

Dateline DHMH

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

DHMH Wins Award at International Conference

A collaboration between five DHMH employees resulted in a 'best conference paper' award at an international conference held in Baltimore in October.

Ismaila Adebawale, Sam Allen, Rashid Malik, Parveen Shaikh and Zeeshan Zafar, all employees in the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) unit of the Information Resources Management Administration, developed a unique application to save time and money while using GIS software.

Their paper, based on the application, was one of over 200 abstracts submitted to conference organizers and one of 36 accepted for presentation at the Geomed 03 conference, held at the University of Maryland Medical School.

The Interactive Health Application (IHA) developed by the team uses a computer tool bar to insert layers of data into a Maryland map generated by the GIS software. Data is represented on the map by a point, line or polygon; to call up the data, all the user has to do is click on one of these features.

The application has the ability to find, search or sort data, it can conduct a query of the database, it allows users to zoom in or out on the area under study and also enables users to pull up aerial photography of the area.

It combines almost any kind of health-related data with any type of geographic data, such as streets, buildings and people.

"This will save the Department a lot of money," said Jim Thomas, administrator of the GIS unit. "It is a very unique tool that makes decision-making so much easier." Just one example of how

an effort to address problems encountered by health professionals in applying GIS to health applications. "IHA has reduced the learning curve from a number of days to a number of hours," Thomas said.

Programs and units within DHMH that are currently using the application include the AIDS Administration, colorectal cancer, emergency management, environmental health, the Family Health Administration, HealthChoice, Healthy Kids, the Office of Health Care Quality and the West Nile virus unit.

The Geomed 03 Conference showcased the latest developments, research and accomplishments in the application of geo-spatial analysis techniques in public health. Sponsors represented leading international health research organizations, including the International Research Partnership for Infectious Diseases, the University of Maryland Medical School, the Oxford University Department of Zoology, the University of Michigan School of Public Health, the State of New York Department of Public Health, Cambridge University and the University of Paris.



From left, Information Systems Division Chief Mike Compton and GIS Administrator Jim Thomas, with Zeeshan Zafar, Rashid Malik, Sam Allen, and Parveen Shaikh (seated).

the application can save time and money is through grant writing -- necessary data is just a mouse-click away.

The concept was developed in

Dr. John A. Grant To Retire

Dr. John A. Grant, health officer for Caroline and Kent counties, is retiring in January after 31 years of State service.



After obtaining his medical training at the University of Pennsylvania and completing an internship and residency at the University of Maryland, Dr. Grant began his career in private practice as a pediatrician in his hometown of Hanover, Pennsylvania.

"I think I always wanted to be a doctor," said Grant, "As a child I greatly admired our family doctor, and wanted to be like him. I knew I would one day pursue a career in medicine."

Despite his early ambitions, Grant discovered after a few years that pediatric practice was not for him. So when he was offered the position of Chief of School Health with DHMH, he eagerly accepted the job.

"Shortly thereafter, I realized I didn't know a darn thing about public health," said Grant, "So I went to Johns Hopkins for my Master's degree. It was then that I fell in love with the science of epidemiology and the practice of public health."

Upon finishing his degree, Grant took a position as an associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Maryland. He found teaching and research to be exciting, but stressful and exhausting. So, two years later, when another DHMH career opportunity came along, Grant happily accepted the post of health officer for Kent County. Five years later, Caroline County was added to his jurisdiction.

Only about a week into the job, Grant faced his first public health crisis — Hurricane Agnes.

"It was quite an event," he recalled. "Some areas of the county were entirely under water, and there were downed trees everywhere." But Grant pointed out that an organized, team approach to handling public concerns led the county smoothly through the disaster.

Grant notes that while he's had many satisfying accomplishments over his career, the one he is most proud of is Kent and Caroline counties' infant immunization program, called TRAC — To Reach All Children.

"Every newborn's name is added to a birth registry, and the child's mother is given a booklet of coupons, each redeemable for a required immunization," Grant explained. "On the reverse side of each coupon is a postcard mailer, so that after immunizing the child, the doctor can mail the coupon back to the health department to update the child's records."

Health department nurses make follow-up visits to the child's home if the postcards have not been returned on time. The results have been impressive. "For the past five years, both Kent and Caroline counties

have had a 100 percent infant immunization rate," said Grant.

Although he's looking forward to retirement, Grant doesn't plan to hang up his hat permanently.

"I am exploring ways that I might stay involved in the public health system, perhaps in a consultant capacity. I've really loved my work, and it's hard to leave it entirely," he said.

In the meantime, Grant plans to enjoy the extra time that retirement will afford him. "I'm just looking forward to playing with my dogs, and watching the birds."

Editor's Note: Thanks to Tara Snyder, Community Health Educator in the Center of Health Promotion, Education and Tobacco Use Prevention, for writing this article.

Congratulations to . . .

Dr. David Blythe, who has been appointed State Epidemiologist. Dr. Blythe, who has been with DHMH since 1998, has been Acting State Epidemiologist for the past 18 months.

Cheryl Hastings, who coordinated a bake sale for the Medical Care Programs' Office of Planning and Finance. The sale featured home-made goods and raised nearly \$600 for the Maryland Charity Campaign.

Tracy Bryan, Deborah Hoppe, Jody Menikheim, Torpekai Miazad, Sandy Samuelson, Art Senkel, Dipti Shah and Sharon Wallace, who all won Unsung Hero Awards from the Community Health Administration for the work they have done over the previous 12 months. The awards are presented every October.

Magic of Trains Comes to Brandenburg Center

When someone mentions model trains, a bit of nostalgia stirs in many of us. Whether it is HO, O or standard gauge, Plasticville houses or homemade creations, the hobby has captivated imaginations across the Mid-Atlantic for decades.

Many have never really given up that love of designing layouts and watching their favorite rail line circle a simple oval or negotiate a more complex series of switches, twists and turns.

It is that love of trains that has brought a group of community volunteers and staff from the Brandenburg Hospital Center in Cumberland together to bring the joy of model railroading to consumers of the Developmental Disabilities Administration facility in Western Maryland.



"It really is a win-win situation," said Cindy Garner, a 22-year employee of the Center and a member of the Community Model Railroad Club. "They have the trains and we have the space," she said of the agreement that has enabled Club members to construct a permanent five-train display in the Center's Day Room.



Calendar of Events

Tuesday, December 9 — *workshop*: **Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART Recovery): An Addictions Treatment Alternative**; University System of Maryland - Shady Grove Center; 8:30 a.m. - 4:15 p.m.; \$120. Approved for Category I continuing education credits. Phone 410-706-1839 for more information.

Tuesday, December 9 — *workshop*: **Suicidality and The Trauma Survivor**; University of Maryland School of Social Work; 8:30 a.m. - 4:15 p.m.; \$120. Approved for Category I continuing education credits. Phone 410-706-1839 for more information.

Tuesday, December 16 — *workshop*: **An Introduction to Financial Analysis and Management in the Human Services**; University of Maryland School of Social Work; 8:30 a.m. - 4:15 p.m.; \$120. Approved for Category I continuing education credits. Phone 410-706-1839 for more information.

Tuesday and Wednesday, January 27 - 28 — **Blood Drive**, 9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. O'Connor Building lobby. Call Stephanie Brown at 410-767-6403 for more information or to reserve a time.

Tuesday and Wednesday, April 20 - 21 — **Blood Drive**, 9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. O'Connor Building lobby. Call Stephanie Brown at 410-767-6403 for more information or to reserve a time.

Sunday, May 2 — **National Alliance of Mentally Ill Walk**; Centennial Park in Howard County; check-in: 10:00 a.m., walk: 11:00 a.m. Co-sponsored by the Mental Hygiene Administration. Call Jean Smith at 410-402-7517 for more information.

Top left: Joe Brumage and Cindy Garner, with one of the items Cindy donated.

Top right: Club members (from left) Ray Chaney, Cindy Garner, John Ternent and Joe Brumage.

Construction of the layout began in August and the trains will be making their appointed runs on weekends between Thanksgiving and New Year's, according to Joe Brumage, leader of the Club and manager of a Cumberland-area drug store.

The approximate 18' by 16' display has been constructed with the Brandenburg consumer in mind.

"We have made it so the wheelchairs can roll right up to the table and the residents can see the action up close," said Ray D. Chaney, one of the volunteers who spends part of his retirement with this effort. *Continued*

Magic of Trains *Con't.*

"We will have adaptive controls so the residents can operate some of the accessories."

Because all of the rolling stock and locomotives are owned by the members of the volunteer organization, most of the trains will be on display only when the Club members are present to operate the O-gauge layout. However, one train will always be on display to entertain and provide sensory stimulation for the 22 consumers who live at the Hospital Center.

Cindy, who is coordinator of special programs at Brandenburg, is working with the consumers to introduce them to the idea of model railroading. To help with the effort, she has donated many pieces of railroad memorabilia — including hats, magazines, books and pictures. She is using these props to orient the consumers to the theme.

One consumer, whose father worked in the railroad industry, is already a member of the Club.

"The staff is also interested in this," said Cindy. "Many are eager to get involved and most are asking, 'How are the train guys doing?'"

The prospective Club members toured Brandenburg before agreeing to begin the project. "We expected to see a hospital-type setting," Joe said. "Instead, what we found was a home inside of a building."

It will come as no surprise that the scenery and equipment will have a distinct Western Maryland flavor.

"The scenery will resemble the

mountains in the Western Maryland area," Joe said. The equipment will include the Western Maryland, B & O and modern CSX lines, he said, noting one of the CSX locomotives is even named the Spirit of Cumberland.

As for the design of the track, John Ternent, another volunteer, used modern technology to develop the project.



John Ternent places one of the cars on the track.

"Mike's Train House (MTH) in Columbia has a CD ROM that helps you design the layout piece by piece," John said. "When you are done, it tells you the number of switches and pieces of straight and curved track you need. It even tells you how much the track will cost."

Track cost will not be an issue for the Club, however, since MTH has agreed to donate all of the necessary track.

In addition to providing some entertainment and stimulation for the consumers, the project is also being followed by a New York-area university that is studying the possible therapeutic benefits of model trains for people with disabilities. This will

provide an opportunity to see if model railroading will also help those with developmental disabilities.

Although the trains will be running this year, the scenery and many of the operating accessories will take more time to install. Center staff will have another opportunity to get involved, this time by painting designs on a wall that will complement the scenery supplied by the Club.

"This comes from the heart, and from the love of trains," Joe said. "What really brought us together is the ability to do this for the residents."

The public is invited to stop by and watch the trains roll during the Sunday open houses from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. between Thanksgiving and New Year's.



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